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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TOKYO 001272

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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY'S DINNER WITH JAPANESE DIET MEMBERS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Joseph R. Donovan for reason 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Six Party Talks, the abductees problem, China, Afghanistan, and Iraq were the focus of discussions over dinner between Deputy Secretary Negroponte and a cross section of Japanese Diet members May 9 in Tokyo. Diet members underscored the political importance of addressing the abductees problem, which is the overwhelming concern of the Japanese public. On China, the Deputy Secretary stressed the need to engage the leadership, particularly given its growing economic clout. On Iraq and Afghanistan, the Diet members pointed to the Japanese public's reluctance to participate in dangerous war zones, and suggested there was little enthusiasm for any active role for Japan at this time. End summary.

¶2. (C) A cross section of seven Diet members from the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and the Komeito Party asked the Deputy Secretary about U.S. North Korea policy, in particular whether there had been a shift toward a tougher line against Pyongyang. DPJ Lower House member Masaharu Nakagawa asked if the decision to release information about North Korean cooperation in developing a nuclear capability in Syria signaled a tilt toward a harder line. The Deputy Secretary said no, the decision had come after a lengthy internal debate in the United States. Ultimately, the sense was that the information was going to come out eventually and it made no sense to withhold it until later. The Deputy Secretary underscored that the U.S. policy toward North Korea remained the same -- to pursue denuclearization.

Japanese Fixated on Abductees

¶3. (C) DPJ Lower House member Shinkun Haku said the overwhelming focus of the Japanese public was not on the nuclear proliferation problem but on the abductees question. He estimated that the split was 80 percent - 20 percent with the public overwhelmingly concerned about the abductees question. Most of the Diet members who spoke on the issue acknowledged that the public was very "domestic" in its focus, and this made it difficult for the government not to keep the abductee issue at the top of its list of foreign policy priorities. The government faced enormous pressure to

take a hard line.

¶4. (C) Nakagawa said the abductee question left the Japanese very "frustrated," adding that it was increasingly difficult for Japan to keep the problem as a bilateral matter with North Korea. We can't "stand alone," he told the Deputy Secretary. Nakagawa recognized the importance of moving ahead with denuclearization through the Six Party process but suggested as a matter of reducing the "political trauma" for the Japanese government, it would be better if the abductee issue were somehow "multilateralized," perhaps in a separate track. That way the government would not be blamed if there were a discernible lack of progress. It is a "very, very sensitive issue," Haku said, and it has served to underscore the lack of trust the public has for the government.

¶5. (C) The Deputy Secretary and Charge Donovan reassured the Diet members that Japan was not alone in raising the abductees question. The Deputy Secretary noted that President Bush had made an effort to meet some of the family members of abductees and remained very concerned about the issue. So had Vice President Cheney. Donovan noted that EAP Assistant Secretary Chris Hill raises the matter at every opportunity when he meets with the North Koreans. The United States is trying to help raise this issue's profile to find resolution, he said. LDP Lower House member Akiko Yamanaka said she appreciated U.S. efforts but added it would be "impossible" to find a fuller resolution of the problem -- for one thing, "Japan doesn't have all the facts," she complained.

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China as Emerging Power in Region

¶6. (C) With Chinese President Hu wrapping up a four-day visit to Japan, the Diet members asked the Deputy Secretary for his thoughts on China. The Deputy Secretary stressed the importance of engagement. There were problems the United States and China had, but the two sides must continue to talk. The Charge said the good news was that the sorts of problems the United States encountered with China in recent years -- mostly over economic issues -- are of a different magnitude compared to the harsh rhetoric coming out of Beijing in the 1960s. In the short run, we will have problems with China. In the long run, there is reason for optimism. To echo the emphasis in China on economic development, the Deputy Secretary noted what President Hu had told President Bush was his top priority -- creating 25 million jobs a year.

¶7. (C) Asked about Tibet, the Deputy Secretary said the Chinese and the Tibetans need to have a better dialogue. The situation is very difficult, and the two sides needed to agree on a definition of "autonomy." Komeito Party Lower House member Isamu Ueda noted that France had taken a surprisingly more hard line position against China. The Deputy Secretary said France's position did not look especially well thought out. He underscored that President Bush was resisting pressure to boycott the Olympic opening ceremony over the Tibet crisis, although there were significant interest groups in the United States which favored a shift toward a harder line. The Deputy Secretary added that, given the warm welcome President Hu received in Japan, it was clear that Japan must not favor a boycott either.

Iraq and Afghanistan

¶8. (C) The Deputy Secretary asked the Diet members about Japan's attitude toward participating in international forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Echoing other Diet members, LDP Upper House member Masahisa Sato said the Japanese public was generally not supportive of sending self defense force

personnel to danger zones abroad. Sato -- who was recruited into politics a year ago after a distinguished career in the Japanese Self Defense Force that included a stint in Iraq -- said that the use of weapons for Japanese forces was "very difficult." Shinkun Haku added that the public simply cannot understand why Japan would send troops overseas.

¶9. (C) Another factor limiting any enthusiasm for sending forces abroad, according to Haku, was the lack of information the Ministry of Defense made available. He noted Diet members often had to track down information on U.S.-based websites. The broader question of information sharing with Japan was a difficult issue for the United States, the Deputy Secretary noted. We have had cases of sharing highly sensitive information with Japanese officials only to have it leaked to the press within hours. Yamanaka acknowledged the problem, which was in part due to the lack of any means of punishing violators. The Deputy Secretary noted the difficulty of punishing politicians who leak information, but added that the United States has long encouraged Japan to pass an official secrets act.

¶10. (U) May 9, 2008, 1930-2130 hours, at the Charge d'Affaires residence. The following participants were present in the meeting:

U.S. Participants:
The Deputy Secretary
Embassy Tokyo Charge d'Affaires Joe Donovan
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense David Sedney
Special Assistant Kaye Lee

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Special Assistant Ted Wittenstein
Nicholas Hill (Notetaker)

Japanese Participants:
LDP Representative Yasutoshi Nishimura
LDP Representative Akiko Yamanaka
LDP Councillor Masahisa Sato
Komeito Representative Isamu Ueda
DPJ Representative Masahura Nakagawa
DPJ Councillor Shinkun Haku
DPJ Councillor Naoki Kazama

¶11. (U) The Deputy Secretary has cleared this cable.

DONOVAN